

APPLICATION FOR LETTERS PATENT
OF THE UNITED STATES
(Express Mail Label No. EL 904320101 US)

NAME OF INVENTOR: Shahzad Akbar
14407 Wood Duck Lane
Colonial Heights, VA 23834

TITLE OF INVENTION: Electrostatic Damage (ESD)
Protected Photomask

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN, THE FOLLOWING IS
A SPECIFICATION OF THE AFORESAID INVENTION

0920504-0301
T07030-40502660

ELECTROSTATIC DAMAGE (ESD) PROTECTED PHOTOMASK

TECHNICAL FIELD

10 The present invention is related to photolithography
5 and photomasks used in the fabrication of semiconductor
microchips and more particularly to preventing or
reducing the damage caused by the discharge of
electrostatic fields between metallic patterns on the
reticle plate or photomask.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

15 Electrostatic damage (ESD) is a well-known and
commonly understood phenomenon in microelectronics. This
phenomenon seriously impacts photomasks used in the
fabrication of micro circuitry and results in unexpected
and undiscovered defects on the reticle or photomask
which can then be used to print defective semiconductor
chips causing substantial yield and photolithographic
manufacturing problems in semiconductor fabrication
20 lines.

ESD events or discharges can occur on reticles when
a build-up charge on one portion of the pattern
discharges or causes a current to flow from one portion
of the pattern to any surrounding point that is not at
25 the same potential. If the potential difference is
sufficient to cause breakdown of the intervening

09020504-030304

insulating medium, the metallic pattern such as chromium or molybdenum may melt or evaporate and then the melted metallic vapors or material may be re-deposited in the spaces between the intended pattern lines or shapes.

5 This will generate undesired defects that will then be printed on the silicon wafer. As will be understood by those skilled in the art, if the defective photomask is not detected at the time the ESD event occurs, the defective photomask may be used to print thousands and
10 thousands of microchips on various wafers. It is then not until later testing and quality control that the defect would be discovered. By that time, millions of dollars may have been lost due to the defective photomask.

15 It is not the electrostatic charging alone which causes damage to the reticles, it is the actual discharge between two isolated portions of the pattern (usually metallic) having different potentials. Various techniques already exist for the dissipative discharging
20 of the charge on the mask and include ionized air, conductive glows, conductive shoes, floor mats, hand bands, and the use of electrically conductive materials of construction of the reticle carriers in transportation pods. Unfortunately, the charge still builds up in a
25 significant number of cases, and it is the discharge which causes the damage.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

Therefore, it is an object of the present invention to provide a low cost photomask or reticle and method of manufacturing such a reticle or photomask that provides
5 substantial protection against ESD damage.

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method of manufacturing reticles and photomasks and to produce a resulting reticle and photomask which does not require the costly procedures of preventing an
10 electrostatic buildup on a reticle or photomask.

These and other objects are achieved by the present invention which comprises a photomask and a method of manufacturing a photomask which is protected against ESD (electrostatic discharge) or electrostatic damage.
15 According to the inventions, there is included a substrate such as fused quartz or silica which is transparent to the wavelength of light used for printing circuits or microchips on a wafer. The substrate includes a front face and a back face with a pattern
20 permanently applied or adhered to the front face. The pattern is opaque to the wavelength of light used for printing and is typically a metal such as chromium and molybdenum silicide. A conductive film which is also transparent to light having a wavelength used for
25 printing is deposited at least over those portions of the front face of the substrate not covered by the opaque

0920504-03001
T010304-03001

pattern. For example, according to one embodiment, the
conductive transparent film covers the entire front face
including a previously deposited pattern. However,
according to another embodiment, the conductive
5 transparent film is deposited before the pattern is
deposited and covers the entire front face. The pattern
is then deposited over the combination substrate and
conductive transparent film. The "transparent"
conductive film is selected from a group of materials
10 consisting of ITO (Indium Tin Oxide), Palladium,
Platinum, Gold and conductive polymers, depending on the
wavelength of the light chosen for printing. In
addition, the thickness of the deposited layer of film
will also be dependent upon the wavelength of the light
15 used for printing.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

These and other features of the present invention
will be more fully disclosed when taken in conjunction
20 with the following detailed description of embodiments of
the invention in which:

Figures 1 and 1a are an illustration of a cross-
section of a prior art reticle or photomask on a
transparent substrate;
25 Figure 2 shows a cross-section and an enlarged
cross-section of one embodiment of the present invention;

Figure 3 shows a cross-section and an enlarged cross-section of an alternate embodiment of the present invention.

Corresponding numerals and symbols in the different figures refer to corresponding parts unless otherwise indicated. The figures are drawn to clearly illustrate the relevant aspects of the preferred embodiments, and are not necessarily drawn to scale.

10 DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

Referring now to Figure 1, there is shown a photomask 8 comprising a substrate 10 for supporting the pattern to be used in a photolithography process for printing circuits on a silicon wafer. As is understood by those skilled in the art, substrate 10 of the photomask 8 is made of a transparent material such as, for example, fused quartz or silica. The pattern, on the other hand, used for creating the lines or conductors (i.e. circuits) on the wafer or chip is made from a material that is opaque to the light used for the printing process. Typically, the patterns are made from a metallic material such as chromium or molybdenum silicide. As shown in the drawings, the metallic patterns 12, 14, 16 and 18 of photomask 8 are deposited on the transparent fused silica substrate 10 such that when light from source 20 is directed at the reticle or

photomask 8, the light produces a negative of the image of the pattern on a wafer substrate 22 having a photoresist layer 24.

In the past, and prior to the present invention,
5 damage often occurred to the photomask 8 when an electrostatic charge would build up on one of the lines or metallic strips comprising the pattern such as line 12 shown in Figure 1a. Since it would not be uncommon for the adjoining line shown as pattern portion 14 to be
10 electrically isolated from pattern portion 12, a similar charge may not build up on pattern portion 14. Consequently, an insulation break down between the two portions 12 and 14 would often occur either through the air which will be seen as a spark between portions 12 and
15 14 or along the surface of the semiconductor 10. Even though the discharge occurred over an extremely short period of time, the potential voltage between the two portions 12 and 14 would often be sufficiently great that significant current would actually flow for this
20 extremely short period of time. Consequently, metal of the two pattern portions 12 and 14 would vaporize or melt sufficiently to actually cause a metallic path 26 between the two pattern portions 12 and 14. Thus, when a path 26 was formed, it is obvious that the resulting exposure
25 through the photomask 8 into the silicon wafer 22 was not the same as the intended pattern.

Referring now to Figure 2, there is shown a first embodiment of the present invention. It should be noted that common portions of the invention shown in Figure 2 which are the same as those portions of the prior art Figure 1 will maintain the same reference numbers. As shown, most of the pattern and figure elements are similar. However, there is also shown a thin film 30 of an electrically conductive material which is transparent to the wavelengths of light 21a, 21b and 21c used for printing on the surface of the wafer 22. Thus, it is seen, that the non-conductive or insulating fused quartz, or fused silica substrate shown as plate 10 upon which is deposited the opaque line patterns (typically made from chromium or molybdenum silicide) is covered with an ultra thin film of an electrically conducting but optically transmitting material 30. Consequently, all of the opaque patterns or line traces will now be at the same electrostatic surface potential. This means of course that high voltage differences cannot be generated between adjacent patterns. This prevents damage due to electrostatic discharge.

As is well-known by those skilled in the art, various types of light having different wavelengths are used in the photolithographic process. Further, it will be appreciated that if the reticle or photomask 8 of the present invention shown in Figure 2 is to be used, the

ultra thin conductive film 30 must be transparent to the wavelength of light used for printing on the silicon wafer. Consequently, the choice and thickness of the electrically conducting optically transmitting thin film

5 30 will depend upon the light wavelength used for the photolithographic process. Examples of suitable types of materials to be used for the ultra thin film 30 when printing with different wavelengths of light is shown in Table 1.

10

Table 1

Photolithographic Wavelength	Thin Film Material	Thin Film Thickness
436 nm	Indium Tin Oxide	100 A
248 nm	Palladium	30 A
193 nm	Palladium, Platinum, Gold or conductive polymer	30 - 100 A

Tests have indicated that depending upon the material composition and the deposition conditions, the optical transmission on the ultra thin film 30 can be
15 between 85 and 90% of the operating wavelength, and the electrical conductivity can also be controlled by the deposition parameters, the material composition, and the film thickness.

It will also be appreciated by those skilled in the
20 art, that there are various types of photomasks used in the fabrication of silicon wafers. These include, as examples only, the standard chrome-on-glass (COG), the attenuated phase shift mask (PSM), alternating phase

shift mask (Alt-PSM), optical process correction (OPC), and a flat panel display (FPD) masks. All of the photomasks can be initially fabricated using normal manufacturing procedures.

5 However, after the mask is made but before the pellicle is mounted, according to this embodiment of the present invention, the photomask is coated with the appropriate thin film discussed above with respect to Table 1. Suggested methods of deposition for these
10 different materials are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Thin Film Material	Thin Film Thickness	Deposition Method
Palladium	30 - 50 A	Sputter Deposition
Indium Tin Oxide	100 A	Reactive Sputter Deposition
Conductive Polymer	100 A	PECVD (Phase Enhanced Chemical Vapor Deposition) or Langmuir--Blodgett

Thus, the electrical conductivity, the film integrity and the optical transmission of the thin film
15 can be tested and once proved satisfactory, the pellicle can be mounted and the mask used in the photolithographic camera.

Referring now to Figure 3, there is shown an alternate embodiment of the present invention. According
20 to this embodiment, the electrically conducting optically transmitting thin film 30 is deposited over the fused

quartz or silica transparent substrate 10 prior to the deposition of the photomask lines or pattern. The chromium thin film is then deposited by sputter deposition on top of the film 30 coated substrate 10.

5 The photomask is then fabricated by conventional methods of using an electron or laser pattern generator on the photoresist. The pattern is then etched into the chromium layer. However, at this point, it will be necessary that the wet or dry etch chemistry be adjusted
10 to make it selective to the underlying optical transmitting thin film. In this situation, the fused quartz or silica photomask substrate or blank wafer would basically be surrounded by its own Faraday Cage at an early stage of the reticle fabrication, and therefore,
15 would provide protection from electrostatic damage throughout the manufacturing, transportation, storage and used process in the production of a reticle or photomask.

While the invention has been described with reference to illustrative embodiments, this description
20 is not intended to be construed in a limiting sense. Various modifications in combinations of the illustrative embodiments, as well as other embodiments of the invention, will be apparent to persons skilled in the art upon reference to the description. In addition, the
25 order of process steps may be rearranged by one of ordinary skill in the art, yet still be within the scope

